United Nations A/71/877–S/2017/332

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
24 April 2017

Original: English

General Assembly
Seventy-first session
Agenda items 32 and 37

Security Council
Seventy-second year

Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development

The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan

Letter dated 12 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 1 April 2017 regarding the escalation of the situation on the front line provoked by the armed forces of the Republic of Armenia in April 2016 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 32 and 37, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Yashar **Aliyev**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 12 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the escalation of the situation on the front line in April 2016

One year has passed since the April 2016 escalation on the front line. On 2 April 2016, the armed forces of Armenia increased fighting from their positions in the occupied territories, subjecting the armed forces of Azerbaijan along the line of contact and the adjacent densely populated areas under the control of Azerbaijan to intensive fire with heavy artillery and large-calibre weapons. As a result of Armenia's attacks and subsequent hostilities, 34 towns and villages in Azerbaijan were shelled, and 6 civilians, including children, were killed and 33 seriously wounded. Substantial damages were inflicted upon private and public property.

The armed forces of Azerbaijan have taken, within the internationally recognized borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the counter measures necessary to ensure the safety of the civilian population and to stop further provocations of Armenia.

Armenia's provocative offensive actions also caused casualties and injuries among the servicemen of the armed forces of Azerbaijan. Numerous signs of post-mortem mutilation of the bodies of Azerbaijani servicemen committed by the Armenian side were also registered.

On 5 April 2016, in Moscow, under the mediation efforts of the Russian Federation, a ceasefire was agreed between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Despite that agreement, Armenia subjected the civilian Azerbaijani population in the towns and villages situated along the line of contact to intensive heavy artillery fire on 26 and 27 April 2016.

The April escalation once again demonstrated that the unlawful presence of the armed forces of Armenia in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan remains the main cause of escalation on the front line and is the major impediment to the political settlement of the conflict.

After the April escalation, upon the initiative of the Foreign Ministers of the Co-Chair countries of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), a meeting of the presidents of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia was organized in Vienna on 16 May 2016. At the invitation of the president of the Russian Federation, the presidents of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia and the Russian Federation met in Saint Petersburg on 20 June 2016 and held substantive negotiations towards the resolution of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

However, since then, through deliberate political and military provocations and under various pretexts, Armenia has not made it possible to sustain the momentum for transforming the understandings reached at the Saint Petersburg meeting into concrete actions and for reducing tensions and has not begun the withdrawal of its troops from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

The recent statements and warmongering rhetoric of the political and military leadership of Armenia, and its attempts to boycott and set preconditions for the substantive negotiations, indicate the apparent unwillingness of Armenia to engage constructively in the settlement of the conflict. Continued efforts of Armenia towards strengthening its military build-up in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan

and illegally changing the demographic, cultural and physical character of these territories reveal notorious intentions on the Armenian side to derail the peace process and ensure the annexation of Azerbaijan's territories.

The Republic of Azerbaijan once again underlines that it will never reconcile with the occupation of its territories. The resolution of the conflict is possible only on the basis of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan within its internationally recognized borders.

The principled basis for the settlement of the conflict is laid down in Security Council resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993), which condemn the use of force against Azerbaijan and the occupation of its territories and reaffirm the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the inviolability of its internationally recognized borders. In those resolutions, the Security Council reaffirmed that the Nagorno-Karabakh region is an inalienable part of Azerbaijan and demanded the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of occupying forces from all occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

We urge the international community and the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group to demand that Armenia engage constructively in substantive negotiations with a view to withdrawing its armed forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, changing the status quo of the occupation and ensuring lasting peace in the region.